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INFORMATION REPORT

REPORT

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SUBJECT Information on the Village of Bereznitsa

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2. The village of Bereznitsa is situated on high ground surrounded by undulating farmland of very fertile "black earth". Approximately 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ km east of the village lies the neighbouring village of Skomovo through which passes a small river known locally as Skomovyanka. This river varies in width from 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 meters and at its deepest measures approximately two meters. Pike, perch, carp and red river eels abound in its waters. [redacted] the river overflowed its banks in 1939, pike of 20 inches remained in the fields.

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3. Eight km north of the village is a large pine forest and another forest lies 17 km south of Bereznitsa. The river Nerl is approximately 25 km to the East, the river Klyasma approximately 60 km southeast. The nearest railway station is Starkovo approximately eight km to the South. Other comparative distances were:

Approximately 200 km from Moscow
100 km from Ivanovo
60 km from Vladimir
20 km from Gavril Posad
15 km from Yurvet Polski

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4. The village of Bereznitsa consists of 25 households comprising about 100 inhabitants, only a third of them over 25 years of age. They are all Russians; no other nationalities live in the neighborhood as no other nationality would put up with the extremely low standard of living, "krepostnoye rabstvo", (feudal slavery.)

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5. All the houses in the village are one-roomed wooden houses with thatched roofs, with the exception of the stone house of the former priest, which is now occupied by the president of the Kolkhoz. All buildings are in a bad state of repair, which is due to the very little time at the disposal of the peasants when they are not required to work on behalf of the Kolkhoz. The houses are austere furnished with the barest furniture, most of which is home-made.
6. Lighting is by means of paraffin lamps. Very often lack of paraffin and difficulty in obtaining glass chimneys for the lamps compels the peasants to revert to their age-old custom of using slivers of pinewood as a means of lighting. They will have to wait another 15 years for electric lighting when all the new power stations are built. They are always being told about these new power stations, the cost of which is given as the reason for their present poverty.
7. For the most part, straw is used as fuel augmented by a load or two of wood. Although wood is plentiful in the forest, approximately eight km away, the peasants have great difficulty in obtaining the loan of horses from the Kolkhoz for their private needs.
8. Water was obtained from three wells in the village and was adequate.
9. Each household had $\frac{1}{4}$ hectare of land which is their only means of subsistence. Very few of the villagers still possess a cow of their own, most had to sell their livestock in order to pay the high taxes and nowadays only chickens are kept for their own use.
10. The collective farm includes the whole village of Bereznitsa and farms an area of approximately 350 hectares of which some 110 hectares are meadows.
11. The kolkhoz has four specialized farms (horse, dairy, sheep and pig) and their livestock consisted of:
 - 12 horses
 - 15 cows, 10 heifers
 - 70 sheep
 - 6 sows.
 They also had 25 beehives, but the bees died during a cold winter.
12. Farm machinery consisted of: three ploughs, six cultivators, eight harrows, one horse-drawn threshing machine, one-drawing and sorting machine. The MTS in Gavril Posad provided the tractors
13. The Kolkhoz had the following areas under cultivation:
 - 45 hectares winter rye
 - 10 hectares winter wheat
 - 8 hectares barley
 - 13 hectares oats
 - 5 hectares peas
 - 3 hectares tares
 - 3 hectares millet
 - 1 hectares rootcrops for cattle feeding
 - 15 hectares potatoes
14. The expected crop returns per hectare were 13 cwt of rye or 15 cwt of wheat or 20-25 tons of potatoes.

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18. As this was the only return for their labour, it followed that the 125 "working days" were only a minimum and the members of the kolkhoz were induced out of sheer necessity to put in as many days work as possible. In fact, the peasants were working seven days per week even though they were entitled to a day off. The work on the kolkhoz is "feudal slavery". (Krepostnoye Rabstvo).

19. Taxes on the individual's garden plot and livestock were crippling as the following quotations show:

My parents possessed one cow and two sheep; taxes amounted to:

for the cow - 800 rubles

for the sheep - 300 rubles

In addition 400 litres of milk per year and 40 kg of meat had to be sold to the State for an agreed paltry sum, 400 grammes of wool from each sheep and when the sheep was killed, the skin had to be surrendered. Also 75 eggs for each chicken kept.

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20. [redacted] the "childless" tax, which is applicable for all men from 19 years onwards and girls from 20 [redacted] amounted to 150 rubles per year, 50 rubles when there was one child and 25 rubles for two children.

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21. Everybody was also pressed to subscribe to the State loan.

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22. In order to raise the necessary money, members of the kolkhoz sold their garden produce on the open market at the nearest town, Gavril Posad, nearly 20 km away. This marketing was only possible on Sundays and even then permission had to be sought from the kolkhoz president, which was given only in exceptional circumstances. If they were lucky they were given also the loan of a horse from the kolkhoz once a month. As a rule the peasants did not sell more produce than was absolutely necessary.

23. [redacted] fined [redacted] five "workdays" for going to market on a Sunday without the permission of the president of the kolkhoz. There is no appeal against fines of this kind and any objection would only be followed by victimization. Members of the kolkhoz who are inefficient or do not do their share of compulsory "work-days" are penalized by having part or all of their gardens withdrawn. Consistent loafers are deported.

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24. People over 70 years of age were exempt from paying taxes on their gardens.

25. Mothers of illegitimate children received 50 rubles per month from the State, although illegitimacy is exceptional.

26. There was a hospital in the neighbouring village of Bereshok approximately five km away and treatment was free.

27. Members of the kolkhoz had no holidays, paid or unpaid and even State holidays were not always observed.

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28. Since the autumn of 1948 it was forbidden by law to leave the kolkhoz. Since that date there has been no recruitment for the factory schools or industry. Prior to that date there had been changes. People joined State farms and peasants from the State farms joined the kolkhoz.

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31. There was no political life in the village. The only Party member was the president of the kolkhoz, who was a lawyer from the Ukraine. No interest in politics was shown by the peasants and any agitation left no impression. Nor was there any Komsomol activity. The youths were enrolled in the Komsomol movement when they reported for their pre-military training at the provincial town and any Komsomol training was received there.
32. Not one picture of Stalin could be found in the houses of the village, though pictures of some more popular political leaders such as Kalinin, popular for various "amnesties" carried out in his name were to be seen.
33. There was a club house in the village, but it was not used and in consequence the building was dilapidated.
34. A four-class school was in the village of Skomovo, where two teachers were employed. Because of lack of rooms the 1st and 3rd classes and 2nd and 4th classes were taught together. There were no school fees, but supplies had to be paid for and for the most part no money was available.
35. The nearest church with an officiating priest was in the village of Yarishevo approximately two km from Gavril Posad. Although this was 17 km distant from Bereznitsa, people from the village went to the services. Even though the brigadier insisted that Sunday work had to be done in the fields, absence due to church-going was connived at. There was a church in the village of Belyanitsa approximately two km west of Bereznitsa, but there was no priest. In Bereznitsa itself the church building was ramshackle and yet when passing it people still made the sign of the cross.
36. [redacted] if there were more churches open, and not so far away, many more people would attend the services or use the priest for christenings, weddings and burials. Most children are still christened, for which the priest is paid 50 rubles.
37. [redacted]
38. The nearest post office is in the village of Skomovo, 1½ km away, where the provincial newspapers and "Pravda" are obtainable. There is also a co-operative store. This has been of little interest to members of the kolkhoz because of their great poverty. The village of Skomovo has also a small textile mill employing some 20 people.
39. There is a flour mill in the village of Belyanitsa.
40. [redacted]
41. This undertaking employed some 1,000 workers (Ukrainians, Tartars, Jews and Chuvashi) who were accommodated in barracks. The peat was cut in the surrounding peat bogs and pressed into hard brick shapes at the works. It was said that sufficient peat was available to ensure a supply for at least 40 years. The motive power was provided by six steam engines. [redacted] in the winter they were taken apart and overhauled.
42. [redacted]
43. [redacted]
44. Members of the kolkhoz had no personal documents and thus were obliged to stay on, as the issue of a "spravka" which would entitle them to move to another place would in all but very exceptional cases be refused.

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